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Governor Baker Files Legislation to Establish Innovation Partnership Zones Within School Districts

BOSTON – Today, Governor Charlie Baker filed legislation that will allow local school districts to establish Innovation Partnership Zones as a way to address school underperformance or to encourage innovation. *An Act to Enable the Establishment of Innovation Partnership Zones* creates a framework to facilitate and simplify the process for establishing zones among a group of schools, giving local educators more autonomy and authority to make decisions in the best interest of their students.

“Every student in the Commonwealth should receive a quality education, no matter where they live, and as part of this effort we are committed to improving under performing schools through this proposal,” **said Governor Charlie Baker.** “Innovation Partnership Zones are a collaborative approach that will empower local educators on the ground by giving them more tools to make necessary changes to provide better learning environments for all students and we look forward to working with the Legislature to pass this bill.”

The bill defines an Innovation Partnership Zone as a group of at least two schools or one school enrolling more than 1,000 students that is governed by a board of directors with the approval of the local school committee or the state Board of Elementary and Secondary Education.

“This approach is working successfully in Springfield and we are focused on replicating the model in other struggling districts around the state to produce positive results,” **said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito.** “Innovation Partnership Zones can empower local communities to structure their schools in new and innovative ways to address the unique needs of their own students.”

Established in 2015, the Springfield Empowerment Partnership Zone is a partnership among the state, Springfield school officials, a board of directors, and the Springfield teachers union, and is composed of nine middle schools and Commerce High School. Educators at each school – primarily principals working with teacher leadership teams – have discretion over scheduling, school site budgets, hiring, working conditions, curriculum, and professional development.

The teachers' union contract for the Springfield Zone schools includes higher teacher salaries, as well as additional time for teacher professional development, increased flexibility over the length of school days and school years, and new roles for teacher leaders.

The Governor's legislation would establish a framework so the Springfield model can be replicated in other school districts. Last legislative session, Governor Baker supported similar legislation filed by Senator Eric Lesser (D-Longmeadow) and Rep. Alice Peisch (D-Wellesley).

"Schools themselves need to be the primary unit of change in order to stimulate innovation and drive meaningful change," **said Education Secretary James Peyser**. "Superintendents and other local leaders have asked for new tools and opportunities to make significant improvements as an alternative to state receivership or as a vehicle for accelerating and sustaining innovation."

"I'm interested in any tool that will help communities come together for the benefit of students," **Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley said**. "School improvement is difficult work that can benefit from innovative thinking."

"I have been impressed by the work being done in the Springfield Empowerment Zone and the enthusiasm for the model expressed by the teachers and principal with whom I met. It is critical that all districts have the flexibility to do what best serves the students and that is why I have also filed legislation to facilitate a broader adoption of the practice that has so well served Springfield," **said Rep. Alice Peisch**.

"I stand, with my Superintendent Dan Warwick in support of this education legislation. Based off our own Springfield Empowerment Zone experience, this very unique, respectful and collaborative partnership between our business community, teacher's union, families and students, has combined, what we do well in our public system with the flexibility of a charter system – 'in this initiative, everyone has a seat at the table,'" **said Springfield Mayor Domenic J. Sarno**. "The bottom line here, is what's best for our students and families, especially in an urban setting, to show them that they can and will succeed."

"The Springfield Empowerment Zone Partnership has been very positive for the city's public school district. The increased flexibilities and autonomies that are given to schools under this model has allowed us to make progress in some very challenging schools because school leaders are supported in a way that allows them to make bold, sometimes unprecedented, changes to effectively address the specific challenges facing their schools. The model provides a space that encourages and embraces results-driven creativity," **said Springfield School Superintendent Daniel J. Warwick**.

Under the legislation, a superintendent, mayor, local teachers' union, school committee members, teachers, or a group of parents can initiate the process to create an Innovation Partnership Zone. For schools that are performing in the approximately lowest 15% of all schools statewide, the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education may also initiate a zone as an alternative to receivership or as a transition out of receivership, under state-local governing boards.

In all cases, an Innovation Partnership Zone would only be implemented after extensive consultation with local officials, stakeholders, educators, and parents. Zones would operate subject to renewable five-year performance agreements between the zone's board and the local school committee or the state's Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education.

How it Works:

- A wide pool of community members can initiate an IPZ – including parents
- The Commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education can initiate an IPZ for schools in need of assistance or intervention
- An IPZ board of directors, with local members appointed by either school committee or Commissioner, oversees the approved IPZ proposal and five-year operating plan
- The board of directors can contract with eligible operating entities for day to day management of zone schools – nonprofit organizations, higher education institutions, or groups of experienced educators
- Zone schools receive a minimum of 85% of average per pupil funding for the district
- Zones have the ability to negotiate directly with the local teachers union for changes to facilitate zone objectives , with expedited dispute resolution procedures for schools in need of assistance or intervention

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